

WARRENTON 1N

DRAWER 11A

TOWNS- LINDSAY INTEREST

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Indiana

Cities & Towns

Warrenton

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Dining with Lincoln in southern Indiana

mela Selbert
to the Tribune

EVANSVILLE, Ind.—No visit to this historic town on the Ohio River would be complete without a stop a dozen miles north in Warrenton at the Log Inn, which can boast that "Abraham Lincoln ate here."

The inn is Indiana's oldest resort, but even back in 1844, Lincoln visited after a campaign in support of Henry presidential bid, the Log Inn as far from new. Built in 1844, it was one of the main stage-stops for changing horses on the 21-hour run—in good weather—between Evansville and Vincennes, Ind.

Elpers, who with her husband, Gene, now owns the inn, is delighted to fill us in on the inn's somewhat convoluted history of the building, which was on an Indian trail that became the stagecoach route and later the Dixie Bee Highway (the main route between Cincinnati and Florida).

For 40 or so years as a stage-stop, she told us, the venerable inn which her parents bought in 1871 served at various times as a general store, a tavern, a dance hall, a grocery and, since 1928, a restaurant.

Over the years, numerous additions (the last in 1940s) were made and the original inn was closed in for a dining area. Today, a new dance hall is now a banquet room, and the inn's half dozen antique-filled dining rooms at 500.

The most amazing change for Elpers, who has worked at the inn while her mother and grandfather ran it as a store, occurred in 1963 when a blow weatherboarded off the old building, leaving parts of the original hewn log walls. The chinking between the poplar logs, each 20 inches in diameter, was still in place. The 30-foot log room was, of course, where Lincoln had dined and, she said, looked "just as old locals had said."

In the room, antique log walls gleaming brown, is much as it would have been 161 years ago, though with electric lanterns not kerosene. There's an 1855 potbelly stove, and on the wall are early landscape paintings by a stage-driver's wife, faded photographs of sober men and women from well over a century ago and several portraits of Lincoln.

According to local lore, Elpers told us, a crude stagecoach was scraped out under the "Lincoln room" had been a stop on the Underground Railroad before and during the Civil War.

In the village of Warrenton (founded 15 years after the inn came into being), it's a short drive south to Evansville, where more history and the scenic Ohio River—waits.

The finest building in town is the Neo-Bauhaus Old Vanderburg County Courthouse,



CLAIM TO FAME: Rita Elpers, co-owner of the Log Inn, in the room where Abraham Lincoln dined in 1844.

According to local lore, says Rita Elpers, a crude basement scraped out under the 'Lincoln room' in the Log Inn had been a stop on the Underground Railroad before and during the Civil War.

built in 1888, with its restored marble floors, beautiful oak woodwork and brass handrails. Other interesting period structures include the Victorian Gothic Willard Library, built in 1885 and a mecca for genealogists; the 1869 Romanesque Old Post Office and Customs House; and the 1918 Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum.

And among the museums:

- The Reitz Home, a restored 1871 French Second Empire mansion.
- The Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science, which houses a \$10 million collection of 16th-Century-to-modern paintings and sculptures.

- The Evansville Museum Transportation Center, with vintage rail cars, a railroad diorama and other exhibits interpreting the history of river, rail and aviation transportation in this town of 120,000.

- Koch Planetarium, the oldest in Indiana.

- The Family Place Children's Learning and Exploration Center, where youngsters and adults can play with an anti-gravity mirror, optical illusions and a kaleidoscope.

Other attractions are in the works: An African-American Museum is scheduled to open next year, and a USS LST Ship Memorial, dedicated to those Navy "workhorses" (Landing Ship Tanks) of World War II, is coming this fall. (During their three-year existence, the Evansville Shipyards built 167 of the 328-foot warships, more than any other inland shipyard. The last LST afloat—of the more than 1,000 built—will make Evansville her permanent port.)

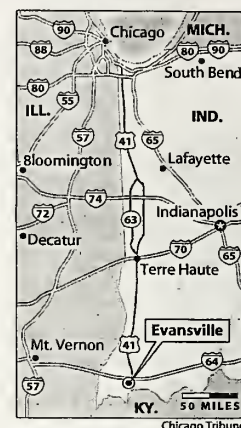
The Aztar Casino, which opened on the river a decade ago, draws more than a million visitors a year.

On our tour of the area, we saved the best for last: Angel Mounds State Historic Site, just outside town to the southeast. One of the best-preserved prehistoric Native American settlements in the country, it covers 603 acres, including the 68-acre Achumbe Nature Preserve along the Ohio.

Driving us through the site along a mown-grass "road," director Mike Linderman explained how some 3,000 people had lived here from 1100 to 1450, building 11 mounds—making it the 10th largest mound site in the country. Along the way he pointed out Mound A, probably the chief's home; a nearby "conical offset" ceremonial site; a reconstructed wattle-and-daub round house, possibly used for council meetings; Mound F, or temple mound; and other sites. A portion of the long-gone 16-foot-high wattle-and-daub stockade, once 6,300 feet long surrounding the village, has been rebuilt, as have several winter houses, summerhouses and a temple.

A new visitor center includes a museum with

IF YOU GO



GETTING THERE

Evansville, Ind., is about 355 miles south of Chicago. The most direct route is Interstate Highway 90 to U.S. Highway 41 South (the old Dixie Bee Highway) through Terre Haute and Vincennes.

INFORMATION

The Log Inn is 12 miles north of Evansville and 1 mile east of U.S. Highway 41 on Old State Road in Warrenton. It is open 4-9 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday and 4-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday (closed Sunday-Monday and in January). 812-867-3216.

For information about museums and other attractions in Evansville, contact the Evansville Convention and Visitors Bureau, 401 S.E. Riverside Drive, Evansville, IN 47713; 812-421-2200 or 800-433-3025; www.evansvillecvb.org.

Angel Mounds State Historic Site is just east of Evansville; take Covert Avenue/Indiana Highway 662 exit off Interstate Highway 164 and follow signs to the site. It is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and 1-5 p.m. Sunday from April through mid-December (closed Monday; Outdoor Village Site closes at 4:30 p.m.). Information: Angel Mounds, 8215 Pollack Ave., Evansville, IN 47715; 812-853-3956; www.angelmounds.org.

—P.S.

dozens of artifacts and a life-size diorama depicting daily life here some 900 years ago. The community had already been abandoned when European explorers arrived, Linderman told us, but since archeologists have found no evidence of war or epidemic, the reason it was abandoned remains a mystery.

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